SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Delivered on the Occasion

of the Opening of

THE SECOND SESSION

of

THE TWENTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE

of the

PROVINCE OF SASKATCHEWAN

MONDAY, APRIL 27, 1992

THE HONOURABLE SYLVIA O. FEDORUK, O.C., S.O.M.
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF SASKATCHEWAN

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly:

It is my privilege to welcome you, on behalf of our Sovereign, Her Majesty the Queen, to the Second Session of the Twenty-Second Legislature of Saskatchewan. I invite you to join with me in extending best wishes to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, as she celebrates the fortieth anniversary of her accession to the Throne.

A MANDATE FOR CHANGE

We come together today, in the spring of 1992, a time of renewal, to set a new direction for Saskatchewan. The people have given my ministers a mandate for fundamental change.

A community that lives beyond its means will not long prosper. People want my government to get their financial house in order.

A community that has lost faith in its elected representatives will not flourish. People want my government to be open, honest and fully accountable.

A community without compassion will not know true progress. People want my government to be fair and compassionate in all its actions.

A community divided will not succeed. People want my government to rekindle the Saskatchewan spirit of community and co-operation.

My government must set a new direction for Saskatchewan in a time of unprecedented economic challenge. It has inherited an overwhelming debt that threatens our economic stability today, and jeopardizes our hopes for economic recovery tomorrow.

Working together, we can meet this challenge. We can rebuild Saskatchewan, turn our economy around, and provide a brighter future for ourselves and our children.

PUTTING OUR FINANCIAL HOUSE IN ORDER

My ministers are determined to restore common sense and competence to the management of the public treasury. Government must learn once again to live within its means.

In recent years, government spending has been out of control. The result has been deficit upon deficit, eating up more of our annual budget simply to pay the interest on past excesses. Every dollar that goes to pay the interest on borrowed money is a dollar that cannot be spent to create jobs, improve our health care, educate our children or provide some other vital service.

Today, Saskatchewan people are burdened with the highest per capita debt in the nation.

A family which lives on borrowed money too long, loses its freedom to make spending choices, and limits its ability to plan for the future. So too with a society. If we fail to get the provincial deficit under control we will soon lose the financial freedom to spend what we choose on vital public services, and we will cripple our ability to plan and invest for the future.

Our children did not create this debt. We have no right to burden them with it.

In a few days, my Minister of Finance will present a budget which will demonstrate a new determination to control government spending, and to reduce the deficit.

OPEN, HONEST AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNMENT

People want government to be more open, honest and accountable. To this end, my ministers appointed the Financial Management Review Commission to 'open the books' and provide an independent audit of the province's financial affairs. Its comprehensive recommendations will improve government's accountability for the expenditure of our tax dollars. Many of those recommendations which require legislative action will be dealt with in this session.

My government will amend *The Provincial Auditor Act* to ensure the early release of the Provincial Auditor's Annual Report, and to improve the Provincial Auditor's access to the books of all Crown agencies.

Amendments will also be made to *The Financial Administration Act* to require the early release of the Public Accounts.

During this session, Members of the Legislative Assembly will also be asked to adopt a Code of Ethical Conduct that will set a high standard of behaviour to which all public office holders should aspire.

Further, a new *Members of the Legislative Assembly Conflict of Interests Act* will be introduced to provide strict guidelines for all elected representatives in the performance of their public duties.

The public wants individual elected representatives to have a stronger voice in government's daily decisions. All-party legislative committees will be revitalized to give private members a stronger role. In addition, a Special Select Committee on Democratic Reform will be established to consult with the public on ways to make the legislature more accountable to the people.

A truly democratic society respects the rights of all minorities. During this session, my government will introduce amendments to *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* to increase the independence of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, and to make the Code more consistent with protections offered in other jurisdictions.

JOBS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

In spite of Saskatchewan's financial problems, there is reason for hope and optimism. Local businesses continue to do well in today's competitive marketplace, and continue to create jobs and opportunities.

The Spar Group is adding sixty employees to its plant in Swift Current, thanks to new multimillion dollar contracts to supply national retail chains with a line of hardware supplies.

Harvest Meats in Yorkton — which produces a line of processed meat products for retail food stores — is enjoying record sales here and in the United States. Its plant now employs more than one hundred people.

In Weyburn, 540 investors have contributed more than $1.4 million to encourage Advanced Test Technologies Incorporated to move to that city to manufacture electronic circuit board testing equipment. The plant has the potential to create 95 jobs.

A new furniture manufacturing company, Palcu Industries, has just been announced for Saskatoon, with the potential to create 35 to 40 jobs in the first year of operation.

In total, there are currently more than 700 companies which have expressed an interest in either relocating to Saskatchewan or expanding their operations here. If these businesses proceed with their plans, they have the potential to create or maintain more than sixteen-thousand jobs.

My government is trying to encourage new economic development in every region of our province, but changes are required to make government's role more effective. Today, there are twenty-seven different government departments, agencies or Crown corporations offering over two hundred separate programs or services to business. This results in duplication, frustration and lost productivity.

My government will be streamlining economic development programs and services in the coming months, to make them more effective and accessible.

My government will improve opportunities for communities to come together to support their own economic development initiatives. Amendments to *The Community Bonds Act* will, for the first time, make co-operatives eligible for financial support. Other amendments will strengthen the review and approval process for community bond projects.

My government will also use Crown corporations to help stimulate economic development. SaskPower is currently evaluating nine proposals from private industry for the development of co-generation power projects. These projects have important economic development potential for rural communities.

SaskTel International continues to sell its telecommunications expertise in the global marketplace, with important contracts in Europe, the United States and the Pacific Rim.

My government will introduce *The SaskEnergy Act* in this session to give our natural gas transmission and distribution utility the statutory power to carry out its mandate more effectively.

Saskatchewan is Canada's most trade-dependent province. Nearly forty per cent of our economic output is for export. My government believes that Saskatchewan needs a new international trade policy to protect our jobs and export markets. A number of international trade concerns currently cloud our economic prospects.

The Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement is a source of economic disruption and uncertainty. Canadian exporters continue to be subjected to trade harassment by American competitors.

The GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) negotiations still underway in Europe will have a profound effect on Saskatchewan's economic future. Yet, the federal government has done little more than provide provinces with after-the-fact briefings on its negotiating positions.

Similarly, the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement, with the United States and Mexico, offers Saskatchewan few benefits, and much cause for concern. Ottawa continues to bargain with limited involvement from the provinces.

My government is determined to change this. If the national government wants provincial assistance in implementing international trade treaties, the provinces must be involved in the negotiation and ratification of such treaties.

Economic recovery must truly be a community-wide effort. **The Premier's Economic Action Committee**, with representatives from business, labour, agriculture and local governments, among others, will be appointed to advise and assist in the economic rejuvenation of Saskatchewan.

AGRICULTURE AND THE ECONOMY

Long-term stability for our farm families is central to our economic recovery.

The first step is a strong and dependable income stabilization plan. The federal-provincial farm safety net programs — GRIP (Gross Revenue Insurance Plan) and NISA (Net Income Stabilization Agreement) — are a beginning, but not sufficient.

Shortly after taking office, my government appointed a producers' committee to review these programs. While the federal government would not allow a major overhaul this year, Saskatchewan did secure approval for a number of important improvements.

My ministers recognize that much more needs to be done for the 1993 crop year. Negotiations are already underway to try to put GRIP on a more realistic cost-of-production formula, to increase Ottawa's share of the cost, and to reduce producer premiums.

My government will continue to pressure Ottawa to live up to its responsibility to protect agriculture from global commodity price wars. An additional cash payment of $500 million is still owing to Canadian farmers to cover grain price deficiencies from the 1990-91 crop year. My government is pleased that the recent First Ministers' Conference on the Economy gave unanimous approval to the need for continuing deficiency payments from the federal treasury.

My government recognizes that while international prices are the root cause of today's problems in agriculture, the severe debt load suffered by many farmers is making matters worse. Therefore, action will be taken based upon the recommendations of the **Farm Debt Advisory Committee**.

The Committee's recommendations include a mandatory six-year lease back program for farmers who surrender their farm land in payment of a debt. My government is discussing these recommendations with farm organizations and lenders. We will be introducing appropriate amendments to *The Saskatchewan Farm Security Act* in this session.

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Economic development must reflect the need to sustain a healthy environment. My government is committed to sustainable development.

My ministers look forward to receiving the **Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development in Saskatchewan**, the final report of the Round Table on Environment and Economy.

The Environmental Charter of Rights and Responsibilities Act will be introduced to guarantee public access to environmental information, and protection for people who report environmental accidents or environmentally hazardous practices.

My government will present a comprehensive proposal to ensure that Saskatchewan will again have the best environmental assessment process in the country. An independent **Environmental Assessment Commission** will be proposed to administer a more open and effective assessment process for major projects. The Commission would also have a mandate to prepare an annual State of the Environment Report for the province.

My government will introduce amendments to *The Parks Act* to increase the amount of land committed to provincial parks and protected areas. These initiatives will add over 215,000 hectares to the Saskatchewan provincial park system. Amendments will also be made to *The Critical Wildlife Habitat Protection Act* to transfer an additional 607,000 hectares of Crown land to the protection of this Act.

QUALITY OF LIFE

In this era of financial restraint, the challenge for government is to find innovative ways to provide improved services to people. Governments must learn to do more with less. Public services like health care and education are essential to our quality of life, but we must constantly search for new, more efficient ways to use the tax dollars spent in these vital areas.

July 1, 1992 will mark the thirtieth anniversary of Medicare in Saskatchewan. Our province pioneered Medicare. Now we must lead the way in developing the next generation of Medicare.

For too long people have thought of our health care system only as a way to deal with sickness. That approach assumes an ever-increasing need for costly hospital-based care.

Our view of health care must become much broader. The wellness approach stresses the need to improve our collective well-being by enhancing our social and physical environment, adopting healthier lifestyles, working to prevent disease and disability, helping the elderly to live more independently, and encouraging people to be more responsible for their own state of health.

The wellness approach will also place an increased emphasis on community-based programs and services. Where possible, we will provide care for residents in their homes and communities—so they can be close to the support of friends and family.

To mobilize the full value of our human, technological and financial resources in support of the wellness approach, we must increase integration and co-operation among our facilities, programs and health care professionals. In this regard, my government has already begun to unify the various health boards in Saskatoon and Regina under new, integrated city health boards.

As we plan for the next generation of Medicare, we must also determine how we can best make use of our limited health resources.

To that end, a Health Services Utilization and Research Commission will evaluate the benefits and costs of health procedures, technologies, programs and agencies, and identify options for improving Saskatchewan's performance.

To increase community involvement in health care reform, my government will appoint a **Provincial Health Council.** This Council will give consumers, health providers and community leaders an opportunity to contribute their knowledge and experience to the reform process.

The rapidly changing global economy also requires new approaches to the education of our children. Learning has become a lifelong commitment. My government will work in cooperation with Saskatchewan families, communities, educators and business to help provide new structures, and creative responses to fulfil the vision of lifelong learning.

Change is required. Our province has a high school dropout rate of more than 30 per cent, a lack of industry-sponsored training programs, and a high out-migration of university graduates. No less than in health care, Saskatchewan requires a community-wide effort to help our education system adapt to the changing needs of the 1990s, and to increase lifelong learning opportunities.

My government will create a **Saskatchewan Education Council**, bringing together parents, educators, business, labour, community groups and the appropriate federal and provincial government agencies to advise on improvements to our educational system.

An inquiry into university education will be appointed soon to review university structures and programs, to ensure they meet the needs of both students and the community. A complete evaluation of the structure and programs at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology is already underway.

My government will also explore new ways of using distance education to improve access to educational opportunities for residents of rural and remote areas.

Initiatives with aboriginal organizations will improve equity and access for aboriginal students. A new institute, the Dumont Technical Institute, federated with the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, will be created to enhance skill training for Metis people.

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

While my government is committed to financial restraint, it understands that its actions must be based on the principles of fairness and compassion. We must protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

Ten years ago Saskatchewan had one of the lowest child poverty rates in Canada. Today we have one of the highest. One child in five in Saskatchewan grows up poor.

My government is committed to tackling poverty. The cost of children growing up on the outskirts of hope is too high, both in terms of human potential and increased demands on taxpayers. Hunger and nutrition programs will be enhanced, in co-operation with local communities.

My government is also reviewing all income support programs. This involves co-operation among departments so that health, education, housing and other programs complement each other. My ministers will co-ordinate provincial initiatives with existing federal programs and will be working to form new partnerships with local communities and non-governmental organizations. The goal of my government is to develop a new social safety net to meet the changing conditions of the 1990s.

Breaking the poverty cycle also means creating opportunities for training and employment. Employment and training programs will be consolidated to help those in need receive on-the-job training, upgrade their education, and make long-term career plans. More training programs designed specifically for women are required since over thirty per cent of people on social assistance are single parent women.

Poverty is also a national issue that requires the collaboration of all levels of government. A National Poverty Initiative is required so that ministers responsible for income security can develop, on a co-operative basis, a national plan to reform income security policies.

The challenge of the 1990s is to use our scarce tax dollars as effectively as possible to help those in need. My government will conduct a full review of all seniors' programs, in consultation with seniors' groups, to work toward a guaranteed minimum level of support for seniors.

Putting people first also demands that we take positive steps towards achieving equity for women, while dealing forthrightly with the consequences of gender inequality.

My government is proud that four of its portfolios are held by women, the highest representation in Saskatchewan's history. My government has already appointed 580 people to government agencies, boards and commissions of which 38 per cent are women and 6 per cent are of aboriginal ancestry.

But we are far from satisfied. We will achieve gender balance on government agencies, boards and commissions in the coming months, and we will work to increase aboriginal representation, recognizing that aboriginal people now represent about 12 per cent of the provincial population.

Aboriginal people strengthen Saskatchewan's rich cultural identity. My government recognizes and will promote the right of Indian and Metis people to self-determination and self-reliance, respecting also their right to define, apply and practice their own cultures, customs and traditional community values.

The Saskatchewan Metis Justice Review Committee and the Indian Justice Review Committee have reported, recommending changes relating to youth justice, policing, legal representation, sentencing alternatives, court services and corrections. These changes will improve the relationship between Indian and Metis people and the justice system, and represent an important contribution to the achievement of self-determination.

My government is committed to settling outstanding treaty land entitlements. A proper and efficient process will continue to be exercised in order to demonstrate the sincerity of our commitment.

During the 1980s, the problems of Saskatchewan's northern residents were virtually ignored. My government will reach out to northern communities to find ways to provide jobs, adequate housing and educational opportunities for the people of the North.

A new Northern Works Program will be established. It will employ about 150 northerners in at least nine communities. Seventeen northern communities are currently without conventional water and sewer systems. To meet urgent health concerns, my government will provide additional resources to develop safe drinking water supplies and improved sewage disposal systems in the North.

Forty per cent of the current housing in northern Saskatchewan is in need of repair. The province will be working with northern communities to provide affordable and adequate housing. Construction of new homes and renovation of existing homes will also create employment opportunities for local people.

For nearly ten years, working people in our province had their rights and views ignored. My government intends to change this pattern. Working people need to become full partners in our efforts to revitalize the Saskatchewan economy.

The Construction Industry Labour Relations Act will be introduced to modernize labour relations in the construction industry. Amendments will be made to *The Occupational Health and Safety Act* to better protect working people on the job site. These amendments address the recommendations of the Occupational Health and Safety Council, following its public review of the Act.

Further, my government will introduce amendments to *The Pension Benefits Act* which will enhance minimum standards and protection for workers and their pensions.

The Minister of Labour has appointed a **Trade Union Act Review Committee** to review collective bargaining legislation and the general state of labour-management relations in the province. The Committee has equal representation from labour and employer organizations. This co-operative approach will help develop a more positive workplace atmosphere in Saskatchewan.

Further, it is the intention of my government to conduct a comprehensive review of *The Labour Standards Act* to ensure that the minimum working standards required by this legislation are appropriate for workers in the 1990s.

A STRONG SASKATCHEWAN IN A STRONG CANADA

My government notes that our nation will celebrate the 125th anniversary of Confederation on July 1 of this year. My government also notes that **Canada 125** celebrations are being held in Saskatchewan throughout the year — celebrations that allow our citizens to proclaim that they are proud to be Canadians.

More than ever, these are critical times for our nation. My government is an active participant in intense discussions involving the federal government, the provincial and territorial governments, and aboriginal peoples to achieve a renewed federalism that can unite Canada.

During this session, my government will ask the legislature to appoint a Standing Committee on the Constitution. The purpose of such a Committee would be to receive resolutions from the Canadian Parliament or other provincial legislatures proposing Constitutional amendments, gather public reaction, and recommend appropriate action to our legislature.

CONCLUSION

The legislative plan my government has outlined here today is a major step toward achieving its objectives for this term of office. This plan:

- Begins the task of deficit reduction;
- Sets a new standard of open, honest, and accountable government;
- Provides hope for the disadvantaged; and
- Renews the Saskatchewan spirit of co-operation and community.

My government will ask Saskatchewan people to judge its success over its term of office by whether it has restored common sense and competence to the management of the public treasury, whether it has restored public faith in the ability of politicians to serve the public interest, whether it has given new hope to the less fortunate, and whether it has brought people together.

My ministers are confident that as long as Saskatchewan people work together to solve the challenges we face, we will meet these objectives and prosper.

The Estimates for the year beginning April 1, 1992 will be submitted. I leave you now to the business of this Session, with full confidence that you will favourably discharge your duties and responsibilities. May Divine Providence continue to bless our province and guide the Legislature in all its deliberations.

God save the Queen.